

## ***Trier: Walk in Roman footsteps in historic German town***

You don't have to fly to Rome to walk among Roman ruins, to stand in a coliseum where gladiators once fought or to visit a Roman emperor's palace.

The German city of Trier has the distinction of being one of the oldest settlements in Germany, its history stretches back to when Germany was at the frontier of the Roman Empire. Trier has more Roman ruins than any city north of the Alps and was designated a United Nations World Heritage site in 1986.

Founded by the Romans in 16 B.C. as Augusta Treverorum (City of Augustus in the land of the Treveri), Trier became the capital of the Western Roman Empire in the 3rd century A.D., and from 293-395 A.D. was one of the residences of the emperor. Under the rule of Constantine the Great, 306-337 A.D., the city was rebuilt, and buildings such as the Palastaula and the Imperial Baths were constructed.

In 326 A.D. sections of the imperial family's residential palaces were extended and converted into a large basilica, the remains of which are still partly recognizable around the cathedral. Emperor Constantius II resided in Trier from 328-340 A.D. and from 367 A.D., under Valentinian I, Trier became again an imperial residence until the death of Theodosius I in 395 A.D. At the time Trier was the largest city north of the Alps.

When the Roman army withdrew along the Rhein River at the beginning of the 5th century Trier was repeatedly sacked by the Franks as well as by troops of Attila the Hun in 451 A.D.

The city thrived again in the 14th century when it became home to the prince-electors, those princes who voted for the Holy Roman Emperor. The town was briefly held by France in the early 19th century and then by Prussia in 1815. Karl Marx, the father of communism, was born in the town in 1818.



Today, Trier is a city of about 100,000 people, home to a university and a popular stop for tourists. The town is situated on the Mosel River and surrounded by the Eifel and Hunsrück Mountains. It lies only six miles from the Luxembourg border and makes a good base for exploring the Mosel vineyards, Luxembourg and the nearby mountains.

### ***Things to see***

Start at the **tourist information** office located next to the Porta Nigra to pick up a map of the town and to buy admission tickets. The Trier Card gives free or reduced admission to the main attractions and museums. Most sites can be reached easily by walking. For information visit the city website at [www.trier.de](http://www.trier.de).

### ***Roman ruins***

The **Porta Nigra** (Black Gate) is an imposing 2nd century city gate once part of the 6.4-kilometer city walls. Constructed of red sandstone, it's called the Black Gate due to its dingy appearance after years of accumulated soot and dirt.



The fortified gate has two towers and a courtyard. In the 11th century it was built into a church, St. Simeon, and parts of the church decoration can still be seen inside.

Presently the **city historical museum** located next to the Porta Nigra is closed for renovation and is scheduled to reopen in early 2007. The museum focuses on regional history with emphasis on art and artifacts from the Middle Ages onward.

The **Römische Palastaula** is a vast, 220-foot-long, 90-foot-wide and 118-foot-high, 4th century basilica that was once the throne room of the Roman emperor Constantine. It is the largest surviving single-room Roman building. In medieval times it was part of the prince-electors' residence. Since the 19th century it has been used as a Protestant church.

The remains of the 4th century **Kaiserthermen** (Emperor's baths) shows the vast system of baths and saunas employed by the Romans. You can walk through underground tunnels that were part of the heating system.

The 2nd century A.D. Roman **amphitheater** in Trier could hold 20,000 spectators who were treated to entertainment such as gladiator battles and animal fights. Today it is the site of an annual festival of ancient plays and open-air concerts. Below the arena visitors can walk through underground areas where animals, gladiators and prisoners waited to perform their gruesome spectacles.

Uncovered in the 1980s the **Thermen am Viehmarkt** are the ruins of another Roman bath, one of three in Trier. Covered by a large glass cube the ruins show the outline of the walls and foundations of the bath complex.

There are numerous other Roman sites in Trier including a **Roman bridge** built from 144-152 A.D. over the Mosel — the oldest bridge in Germany — and the 2nd century **Barbaratherman**, another Roman bath.

#### *Other sites to see*

The **Dom**, the city's Catholic cathedral stands on the site of a former emperor's palace. After Constantine's last visit to Trier in 328-329 A.D., the palace was destroyed and replaced by a vast church about four times as big as the present-day cathedral.

After the Roman era much of the church was destroyed and the present cathedral is a medieval construction. The cathedral claims to hold Christ's robe. It is rarely on display, but a reliquary holding the robe can be seen in the Holy Robe Chapel.

Next to the Dom is the **Liebfrauenkirche**, one of Germany's oldest gothic churches.

Next to the Palastaula is the **Prince-Elector's Residence**, a rococo style palace with a restful garden.

The church of **St. Gangolf**, just off the Hauptmarkt, was the Protestant opposition to the Catholic Cathedral. It is entered through a small but flowery gate on the south side of the square. Notice the words near the top of the tower which read, "Stay awake and pray ..."  
Trier's bishop countered by raising one of the cathedral towers higher (he could only afford to raise one) and he had written on his tower the rest of that Bible passage, "for you know not the hour when the Lord will come."

The birthplace of **Karl Marx** is now a museum dedicated to the founder of communism. Marx lived there only for the first year of his life before his family moved to a house near the Porta Nigra. Look for a plaque on the house there where Marx lived until he went away to university.

The city **Hauptmarkt** is a great place to sit with a drink or ice cream and gaze at the medieval and renaissance buildings, the fountain that features women and monkeys, and the market cross. (It's a replica — the 9th century original is in the city museum.) You'll need the time to read your guide book to learn about all that the Roman/German city of Trier has to offer.

**Story and photos by Dennis Johnson**  
*U.S. Army Garrison Hessen Public Affairs Office*

